

184 the Lepchas' ethics and attitudes which go to make a culture are founded on a community of equal citizens; divorced from such a community the Lepcha culture is meaningless. To some extent the
 177 Lepchas have adapted themselves to the changed conditions, accepting the way of life and language of their neighbours. But compared with the Nepali and Plains Indians they are wasteful
 [65] agriculturists and they have a relatively high standard of living; despite some legal protection—the Lepcha cannot be dispossessed of his last five acres of land—it seems as though they must disappear fairly rapidly, either through want or through absorption. In India a certain amount of intermarriage goes on between Lepchas and Nepali; the Lepcha woman is esteemed for her physical appearance and her mild and yielding character.

794 In the last census nearly all Lepchas are entered as Buddhists; a little over a thousand had been converted to Christianity. Despite
 ● 797 the small numbers the Lepchas represent one of the most fruitful fields of missionary endeavour in Northern India; and the conversion of individuals to Christianity seems to have modified the converts' character far more profoundly than the earlier group conversion to Buddhism. The Christians with whom I came in contact exhibited a strong sense of individual sin (an attitude lamaism has been unable to implant) and excessive prudery, with which was coupled a tendency to snigger at excretory functions.

ii

797 In an endeavour to gain converts the Baptist mission went to the length of translating and printing in the artificial Lepcha script
 212 three books of the New Testament. This seems to have been a work of almost complete supererogation, for the Lepcha script, never widely known, has now completely fallen into disuse; in order to read the scriptures Lepchas have to learn a new, and otherwise completely useless, alphabet; most of them are far more familiar with Nepali.

212 The Lepcha alphabet was invented at the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century by King Cha-dor of Sikkim. According to Albert Grünwedel the Lepcha alphabet is derived from a form of the Tibetan U-med alphabet.* Some sort

* This resemblance is not very obvious to the lay eye; out of the 56 Lepcha characters 18 have no parallel in the U-med alphabet, and, of the 38 signs common to both, over half have very different forms.

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however, we took a complete outfit, including even china//4 plates and cups, a regular battery of pots and pans, and vast quantities of a special brand of American coffee (which I must admit was excellent), and special machines for its preparation. Most of the apparatus was never used.

On arrival at Gangtok our staff was increased by Palden, 114 one of His Highness's Lepcha orderlies, who was to act as 124 liaison between us and the locals. He spent most of his time in scouring the countryside in search of chickens and eggs. This job was not quite such a sinecure as perhaps it sounds; for towards the end of our stay we had consumed practically all the local poultry and had to get even eggs from as far as three and four days' journey away. By virtue of his official connection with the Palace, Palden's status (albeit humble; his normal duties consisting in the delivery of letters in Gangtok) was swollen to enormous stature in the eyes of the trusting Lepchas. From our point of view, however, this was all to the good, for it enabled him to demand permission for us to see all sorts of domestic ceremonies which would otherwise have been entirely hidden from our eyes.

There was also Geoffrey's English-speaking interpreter, Sukra Sing; and to work with me, one Dhawa, who spoke Lepcha and Nepali, but who knew no English. Both of these 191 797 were Christians, the latter being a recent convert. They were both very disapproving, as indeed was Palden, of the local Lepchas, to whom they considered themselves vastly superior. On wet days, or on the frequent occasions when we had no informants, Dhawa would spend the whole day, from 534 earliest dawn until well after dark, playing a bamboo flute which he had himself constructed. Unless interrupted he would play right through the Church of Scotland Hymnal, sometimes repeating his favourite tunes five and six times in succession. I believe he did this as an atonement for the extremely Rabelaisian conversations he was at times asked to translate. Whenever the conversation had in his opinion gone far enough in this direction he would get up without a word and slink quietly away; and shortly after we would hear the

114 horribly familiar strains of "Abide with me," slightly out of
124 tune, issuing from the house next door in which he and the
servants lived. I never made any effort to restrain him, for
which I hope to receive due credit in any future existence
which may be my lot.

Sukra Sing was what in India is technically known as a
"compounder," which means that he had worked in a
hospital for some months, knew a certain amount (in his
case a dangerous amount) of simple doctoring and first-aid
methods, and was authorised to "compound," or make up
medicines to prescription, without, however, being re-
sponsible if he inadvertently confused aconite with aqua. He

[797] was also under training as a missionary and was working
under the auspices of the Church of Scotland, whose
missionaries are rightly interested less in obtaining "scalps"
than in improving the people's condition, the only possible
excuse, in my opinion, for missionary work amongst primitive
peoples. I shall have more to say about missionary activities
later on in this book; but in the meantime I cannot help
thinking that Sukra Sing will now go out into the field with
considerably more tolerance for his "uncivilised" Lepcha
brethren than would otherwise have been the case. He was
fortunately not musical, but showed signs towards the end of
our stay of a wakening interest in the flute. Dhawa, however,
preferred to play solo.

* * * * *

114 We left Gangtok without any very clear idea of our exact
636 destination. His Highness had suggested Jongu as being the
most suitable place in which to commence our studies; and
so to Jongu we set off. No one was quite sure of the exact
position of this place; nor was the Ordnance Survey map
helpful, for it omitted all trace of this, to us at least, important
place. On arrival at Mangen, however, where we were to
leave the main trade route through Sikkim, the mystery was
solved, for it there transpired that Jongu was not a village but
a district; a district, moreover, which stretched from roughly

CHAPTER 3

A 'STRANGE MIXTURE OF FACT AND FICTION': BEING A BRIEF HISTORY OF SIKKIM

- 161 **S**IKKIM has a population of close on 110,000, of whom 25,780 are said to be Lepchas of one sort or another; but this figure does not distinguish the very large number of men who have intermarried with women of other tribes and whose offspring are accordingly no longer to be reckoned as pure Lepchas. There are no accurate figures available of the total pure Lepcha population of Sikkim, but I imagine it to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 13,000. What can be said, however, without fear of contradiction, is that this number is steadily decreasing year by year. The reasons for this are at present not clear to me; but I believe the principal cause to be contact of the easy-going and extremely non-materialistic Lepchas with the excessively virile, more thrifty and individualistic Gurkhas. The latter, finding insufficient land in their own country, are ever seeking for fresh places in which to settle; and during the process the Lepchas have been to a great extent absorbed or at least driven further and further into the hills. The settlement of Gurkhas and others in Sikkim is now controlled; but the Lepchas have already decreased to such an extent that legislation can now do no more than retard their complete extinction, that is, as a separate tribe, for a
- [144] few years longer. They claim to be the original inhabitants
[197] of Sikkim. They are of Mongoloid appearance and speak a language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group.
- [173] The early history of Sikkim is mainly based on Lepcha
[797] oral tradition, but the reigning family seems to have been from the first Tibetan. The Tibetan form of Buddhism, generally known as Lamaism, is believed to have been

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introduced into the country about the middle of the seven-¹⁷³
teenth century by Lha-Tsun Ch'em-Bo, the patron saint of⁷⁹⁷ ●
Sikkim.

Lha-Tsun is so intimately connected with the local form¹⁷⁵
of Lamaism, figures so frequently in the strange hotch-potch
of fact and fiction that passes for history, that it is essential
to give some details of his life, so far as they are known.

Lha-Tsun Ch'em-Bo is a Tibetan title meaning "The
great reverend god." His ordinary religious name is Kun-
zan num-gye, or "The entirely victorious essence of good-
ness"; but he is also known by the title of Lha-tsun num
kha Jig-may, or "the reverend god who fears not the sky."
This is with reference to his alleged power of flying. He has
yet another name, being sometimes referred to as Kusho
Dsog-ch'en Ch'em-bo, or "The great and honourable
Dsog-ch'en," the latter part of which name means literally
"The great end," this being the technical name for the
particular system of mysticism practised by the Nin-ma-pa
sect, of which he was a member. Kusho means merely "the
honourable," and is the title by which all persons of position
are addressed in Tibet.

He was born in the fire-bird year of the tenth of the sixty-
year cycles, corresponding to A.D. 1595, in the district of
Kongbu, in south-eastern Tibet. Having spent many years
in various monasteries and in travelling through Tibet and
Sikkim, he eventually arrived in Lhasa in 1648, where he
obtained such repute by his learning that he attracted the
favourable notice of one Nag-wan, the greatest of the Grand
Lamas, who shortly afterwards became the first of the
so-called Dalai Lamas. Indeed, it is said that it was mainly
through the special instructions given by Lha-tsun to the
Grand Lama that the latter was so favourably treated by the
Emperor of China and confirmed in the temporal rule of Tibet.

The detailed account of the saint's meeting with
Nag-wan is worth citing as an example of the curious
blend of the crude and the marvellous, of which most
of these indigenous narratives are composed.

755 and have found no reference to it in any of the books on
 171 that country. In view of the fact that the word is pure Tibetan, one would have expected to find it mentioned. Anyone witnessing the ceremony must have been struck by the peculiarities of the figure itself: but there has been no modern account of Tibetan social life, and it is possible that if any of the earlier travellers saw a Go-sum he may have considered it too shocking to describe! The ceremony
 • [797] is no longer carried out by Lepchas in the Kalimpong district, where missionary influence is strong, but is popular all over Sikkim, where it is held in great esteem by Lepchas and Tibetans alike.

755 Here is an example of treatment of a different kind.
 805 Chano's wife had been unwell for several weeks, but was suffering from no specific illness. Her husband, however,
 [797] who was himself a Lama, thought there might be something wrong and asked Tafoor to work out a horoscope for the next few months. He did this in our presence; but in order
 [777] to make it intelligible it is necessary to understand something of the chronological system current in Tibet, as it is used for indicating lucky and unlucky times as well as the times for much of the worship. Except in official correspondence with the outside world it is in use all over Sikkim.

805 "The Tibetan system of reckoning time, derived from China and India, is based upon the twelve-year and sixty-year cycles of Jupiter. The twelve-year cycle is used for short periods, and the particular year, as in the Chinese style, bears the name of one or other of the twelve cyclic animals:—

1 Mouse (Rat)	1912*	5 Dragon	1916	9 Monkey	1920
2 Ox	1913	6 Serpent	1917	10 Bird (Hen)	1921
3 Tiger	1914	7 Horse	1918	11 Dog	1922
4 Hare (Kite)	1915	8 Sheep	1919	12 Pig	1923,
					1935 and so on.

* The names of animals in brackets are Lepcha variants of the standard Tibetan years. The date opposite each is given as an example of one particular cycle.

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the following are examples: *Ka-ka*, or *Ma-ma*—Don't; *A-ji* ⁸⁵⁶₁₉₈
—Take care!; *Bum*—stay there.

Mrs. de Beauvoir Stocks mentions that "deformed children ⁸⁴⁷
are instantly killed, the mother in a case of that sort being
well treated by her husband but badly by her neighbours."
But my information does not in any way confirm this wild
generalisation. All my informants were horrified at the
suggestion that Lepchas practised any form of infanticide.
"Such a thing is never done," said Tafoor, "nor have I
ever heard of it. Even a monster, such as might be the result ⁸²⁶
of two near relatives marrying, would not be killed. The only
case of this sort of which I have ever heard was when, many
generations ago, a cow in Talung gave birth to a human ⁷⁷³
child. The people were very frightened and killed it after
a week."

In a community which desires children above all things, ⁸⁴²
and in which no stigma attaches to illegitimacy, there would
appear to be no reason for indulging in infanticide, and I ⁸⁴⁸
am convinced that in Jongu it is absolutely unknown. In
fairness to Mrs. Stocks, however (whose account is admittedly
compiled from odds and ends of information gathered from
all over the place), I should add that Miss Scott told me that
amongst her Christian Lepcha community she notices a
marked tendency for illegitimate children not to survive
more than a very few months. If, however, this is due (as
I imagine to be the case) to some form of infanticide—slow
starvation, for instance, or general lack of care—it is one of ⁷⁹⁷
the more unsatisfactory results of Mission influence, since
members of the Church who give birth to illegitimate chil-
dren are not looked upon with favour. Missionaries do a
great deal of admirable work, but it is a great pity that the
Church cannot see its way to compromise in the matters of
polygyny and illegitimacy.

Contraception is not known amongst the Lepchas; nor ⁸⁴²
does a woman take any action to induce a miscarriage when ⁸⁴⁷
she knows that she is about to give birth to an illegitimate
child: but in such circumstances should she miscarry she will
say nothing about it.

- 000 another; one, moreover, the tenets of which are not yet sufficiently practised in our own country. But there can be
- 797 nothing but praise for the work done by the Church of Scotland among the Lepchas and others in the Kalimpong and adjacent districts, where, owing to the inspired leadership of Dr. Graham, whose ideas are still generations ahead of the average orthodox missionary, there has been no destruction but only a building up and strengthening of what was already in existence. In the Kalimpong hills the missionaries attach most importance to raising the standards of health and living, and in most cases conversion only takes place at the personal request of the individual concerned, for it is realised that the good life is not necessarily the prerogative of Christians. As a matter of fact the majority of the Christians in the Kalimpong and Darjeeling districts are Lepchas; not, I think, because there is less difference between Buddhism and Christianity, and the latter and Hinduism, but because the Lepchas have no caste. It is, for instance, possible for one member of a Lepcha family to become a Christian without his relations with the rest of the family becoming in any way estranged, whereas the Nepali, to take the most obvious other example, who is a Hindu, becomes completely outcasted on conversion and can no longer even eat with his family.
- 000 But I am not suggesting that you should permit Christian missionaries to work in Jongu. I do think, however, that you might take a leaf out of their book. What the people require is some simple education adapted to their special needs, and a really sympathetic doctor, someone who, apart from the purely professional side of his work, is also interested in general social problems. In a country like Sikkim, which has a considerable aristocracy of its own, it should surely be possible to interest a few young men and women of the upper classes in your Lepchas, and induce them to devote some part of their lives to improving these people's condition. As an example of what I mean I need only instance the admirable example of Your Highness's own sister and brother-in-

793 The Han-bu-ni from Git-biyong gives us a rather detailed report of her initiation. "My maternal grandmother was a Mun. At the age of nine I fell ill and commenced speaking
[567] a variety of languages. The people said, 'It is the spirit of
[775] her grandmother, the Mun let, who speaks through her.' So my parents summoned a Bong-thing who performed the sacrifice of initiation, offering a bullock, a pig and a goat. Thereafter I was apprenticed to a female Mun for a period of three years during which time I was taught the prayers, the traditions and the ceremonies. After the completion of my apprenticeship the sacrifice was renewed. I was given full powers and began to sacrifice independently. Should
[782] I desire to conjure up my spirit, I offer chi, butter, and incense in sacrifice and the spirit quickly responds to my summons to appear. I notice at first a blurred object, like a cloud of dust approaching me. My heart tells me that the spirit is near."

This woman, who is over eighty years of age today, and is Mun as well as Andshemu, has recently become a
[797] Christian. We asked her whether the old spirit did not harass her for having given up her former priesthood and ceased to honour it. "Not at all. The spirit does not torment me in the least," she replied. Later she proudly said to the Lepchas, "It is my privilege to instruct this great European priest who comes from China and Tibet, in the teachings of the Mun and the Bong-thing." She was very pleased to find us interested in the old traditions. She knew a little Tibetan, and loved to converse with us in that language.

796 A Rong woman, whose father and brother are both Bong-thing, has narrated to us the following story, "In the evening my father drank chi. This made him excited
[535] and he danced through the night. Very often three more Bong-thing came to our house and they all danced together. That is customary with the Mun and the Bong-thing. In the neighbourhood there are three women and two men who hold their dances by turns in each other's houses. This dance festival must take place at least three times a year; —in April at the barley harvest; in September at the first
[778] millet harvest, and finally in October at the second millet
[782] harvest. Torma (Tibetan expression for sacrificial images)